

The House of Many Mysteries: Samuel Frazar House 1793

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

As you pass over the Bluefish River Bridge heading towards Powder Point, you find yourself instinctually looking left over the water to a majestic historical

**Windows
to
the
past**

home known as the Samuel Frazar House. Its size, layout and architecture are mystifying to those who visit. Once inside, they soon realize there are actually two houses and a converted shed all attached to form this beautiful house on St. George Street. Just how the houses, with their distinctively different architectures came together is still a mystery waiting to be solved. There are numerous stories and theories surrounding the prop-

erty, so much so, that if the walls and windows could talk, oh how the researchers and owners would listen!

Most researchers rely on deeds, wills, town meeting documentation and sometimes available genealogy registers to find the first dwellers of an historical home. It is tedious work and difficult to find personal information on early homeowners from these sources. However, some digging and persistence on the part of a researcher can at times lead to a wealth of treasured information.

In the case of the Samuel Frazar House, the persistence of this writer paid off in the discovery of a document that provided a wonderful insight into the personal life of Samuel Frazar. It was an original published pamphlet called



The Samuel Frazar House, 47 Saint George Street.

(Photo by Shelly Babin)



One of two attics in the house contains this unusual entry way out to the roof.

(Photo by Shelly Babin)

"Discourse" which was delivered in Duxbury, August 31, 1838 by the Reverend Josiah Moore at the funeral of Samuel Alden Frazar, Esquire. What better way to learn of a man's accomplishments, his interest, and his life story -than by the eloquent words of his family preacher! The fact the eulogy was published also speaks volumes of the stature and place Samuel Frazar played in Duxbury history.

From the discourse, we learn how Frazar's death was a great loss to the community. "He was not only a devoted husband, a good father, an affectionate brother; he was a generous friend, an upright magistrate, an enlightened and faithful citizen, an honest man," said Moore. Frazar, known mostly for his shipbuilding by historians, was also interested in town politics, and served as a town representative or Deputy

as they called them back then, in 1813 and 1816, as well as other town positions over his lifetime.

He was the son of Captain Thomas and Rebecca Alden of Duxbury, according to geneal-

One of the best-remembered vessels built by Frazar was named "Hitty Tom," after the last female Indian in Duxbury.

ogy by Justin Winsor, and married Abigail Drew in 1791 at the age of forty-nine. They had ten children to fill the large house.

In 1793, Frazar purchased land from Nathan Samson, which was part of the original Samson homestead, noted researcher Robert Dente, who places Frazar in the beautiful Georgian house overlooking

the Bluefish River the same year. Then in 1794, Samuel Frazar was granted permission by the town to build vessels on the northwest end of the Blue Fish River, reopening the old (Israel) Sylvester yard and building for himself and others, said former town historian Dorothy Wentworth in her book "Settlement and Growth of Duxbury." This Sylvester yard is believed to be the second oldest shipbuilding yard in the town.

One of the best-remembered vessels built by Frazar was named "Hitty Tom," after the last female Indian in Duxbury. He also "built the first ship, "Hoogly," for Daniel C. Bacon of Boston," noted Lawrence Bradford in "Historic Duxbury in Plymouth County, Mass."

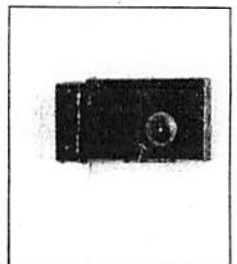
As a young boy Frazar lived with his family in Boston at the start of the Revolution, and was

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impressed "by his father's sacrifices and devotion to the patriot cause," becoming an "enlightened republican," said Moore in his eulogy. He was also "a man of strong feelings," he added. This is exemplified by Frazar's actions during the Embargo Act of 1808, when he "took advantage of a foggy night, and with a schooner laden with fish," successfully escaped passed an armed sloop stationed on the bay, noted Justin Winsor.

Evidence of the shipyard days is seen throughout this historical house which was purchased in 1996 by Trish and Freeman Boynton. The couple have since been restoring the eleven room house, preserving its windows, doors, molding, latches, stairwells, floors, nine fireplaces, shutters, beams and walls. It is truly a labor of love.



The French Lock Boxes in the upstairs bedrooms of the Georgian section.
(Photo by Shelly Babin)

which many would dare not undertake.

The original windows needed repair, so the couple chose to restore them, which required each glass pane of the 12 over 12 windows to be removed and then reinstalled. The glass is a treasure to look through with bubbles and other

"imperfections" denoting its age.

There are beautiful wide pine floors and molding in the house, particularly in the Georgian section. "The far right part closer to St. George Street is the original part, dated 1742, and the other house attached was added later," said Alice Hoyt of Duxbury during a recent interview. Hoyt summered in the house as a child from 1912 to 1933.

Her father, E. Clifford Potter, a successful banker residing in Newton, purchased the historical home at an auction paying \$3,350 for the home and furniture. He appropriately named it *Riverlea*. "It was 5 1/2 acres, as I can recall, and part of the original John Alden property which ran up behind the Cushman house," remarked Hoyt.

The Georgian section of the house "is the finer part," with "lovely French door knobs, while the other part has just wooden latches," remarked Hoyt. The upstairs bedroom doors of the Georgian section also has unique French door locks- large square brass door locks since painted black. Why these elaborate locks exist only here in the bedroom remains a mystery.

Town historian, Katherine Pillsbury, noted that many times more than one generation of a family resided in a home and such locks may have been used to section off the house. Another theory comes from the belief that the attached house on the left was used to board shipyard workers. Perhaps, Samuel Frazar wanted to secure his family at bedtime from them.

Hoyt recalls large storage bins located along both sides of the walls in the large first floor room in this attached house



Backside of house, 1912 with apple orchard.

(Courtesy of Alice Hoyt)



The backside of the Samuel Frazar House with Nick Boynton, age 3.

(Photo by Shelly Babin)

which were used by the ship workers to store their things, and later removed because of termite damage. A very narrow stairwell leads to the bedrooms upstairs in this section of the house, where there is evidence in the floor boards that walls were removed to enlarge the bedrooms, most likely eliminating a number of tiny boarding rooms.

There are three stairwells in

the house, with the larger more formal one added later by converting a parlor room into a foyer and moving the front door from the St. George Street side to face the water. The Boyntons chose to keep the original front door, complete with cracks, and appreciate its amazing oversized L shaped hinges and the original bolt locks.

There are nine fireplaces located throughout the home, some with original beehive ovens. A lovely feature of the formal fireplaces in the Georgian section is the large pine wood panels above them. Another mystery remains concerning the beehive ovens located in both sections of the house. There are beehive ovens located in the rear of these open-hearth fireplaces, in addition to ones outside the hearth. Architecturally speaking, beehive ovens located in the rear wall of the fireplace were indicative of Early American period, before 1730. Why it is found in this Georgian historical house that was built in 1793? Perhaps Frazar decided to copy other historical homes and had them built in; it is difficult to believe his wife used them as they posed a difficult way of cooking. Or could these fireplaces have been salvaged from another house that once stood on or near the site?

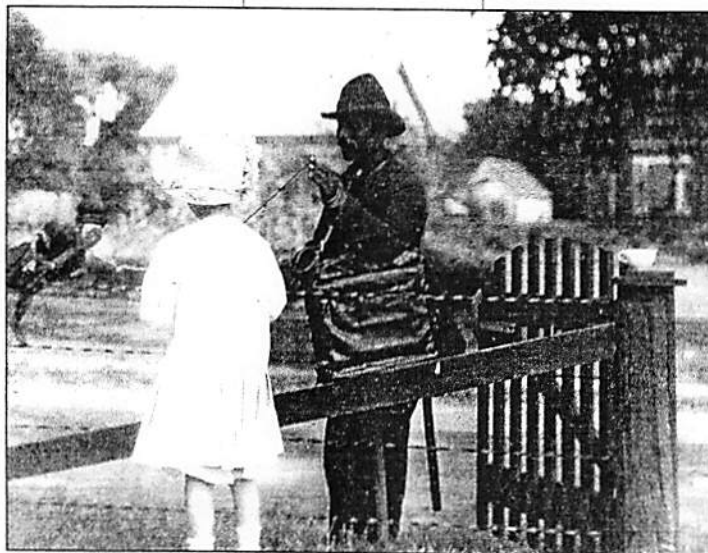
The Boyntons have added some modern conveniences

while maintaining the integrity of their historical home. With the new kitchen, the couple chose to keep the fireplace and expose the original corner beams, while adding wide pine floors similar to those in the rest of the house. The converted shed, which was once used by Hoyt's mother "to keep the milk cool that came from our cow," now serves as an office space and a large mud room to store the many boots and shoes of their five children.

The barn, which was once attached to the house was moved in 1912 by Hoyt's father, who "felt it wasn't safe to have a barn so near the house because of the animals and flies, so Dad moved the barn to the south 50 yards." She recalled there always being a horse, cow and "chickens for us to eat all summer." The Boyntons have since restored and moved the barn to the rear of the property. In its loft, the couple located beams with saw marks made by a pit saw, indicating a date between 1600s and 1750s for those boards.

Their son, Bo dug up horse teeth in one of his many archaeological digs of the property. The couple has also "found old shoes inside the walls we were repairing," said Trish Boynton adding they kept one and returned the rest to the

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"Herdy Gerdy man" and his monkey visit *Riverlea* (47 Saint George Street). Hope Potter gives the pennies to the monkey.

Photo courtesy of Alice Hoyt

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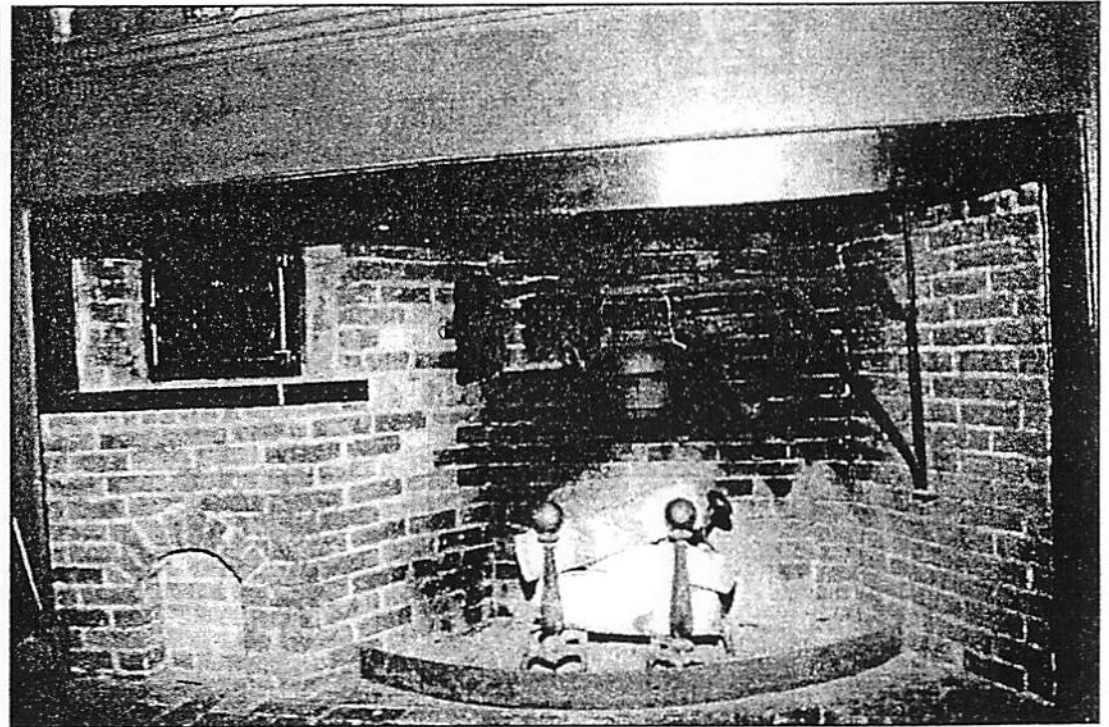
wall for future owners to find.

Other clues of the homestead are found in Samuel Frazar's will. At the time of his death, the house was valued at \$4,600, and he had a great deal of real estate including several houses, house lots, salt meadow, factory wood lot, an orchard and meadow, North Hill pasture, a wharf and store. His total estate was valued at \$19,316. Not bad for a man, who as Moore describes, had "not received the advantages of a public education" but who "acquired knowledge" through "many hours of reading." We can just image a front parlor filled with Frazar's library, such a library is listed in his personal estate in 1838.

After Samuel Frazar's death, the property remained in the Frazar family until 1870, when Amherst Frazar sold it to Emily Howard for \$3,650. Using a conversion factor from the Consumer Price Index to convert this purchase price to the most recent factors available, Howard paid only \$45,625 in 1996 currency terms. She took

advantage of the size and location of the house, which provided the perfect place to take in guests during the summers of the 1890s. Then in 1956, prominent businesses man and a commodore of the Duxbury Yacht Club, John A. Paine purchased the house and resided here until 1963, with only two more owners before the Boyntons.

Mysteries abound in the Samuel Frazar House, as well as questions surrounding this land. Where did those who owned it prior to Samuel Frazar actually reside? Interestingly enough, researcher Henry Fish in his work, "Ancient and Modern," lists this house on his map as rebuilt and the site of Lt. Samuel Nash house, and latter owned by Abraham Samson, 2nd. Lt. Samuel Nash, having come from England to Plymouth in 1632, did have land in somewhere in this area along the Bluefish River as early as 1637 according to the New Plymouth Colony Records. One of Nash's daughters did marry Abraham Samson the first who also resided at the Bluefish River. Recall Samuel Frazar purchased several parcels of



The large Keeping Room Fireplace in the Georgian section of the house contains two beehive ovens, including one in the rear of hearth.

(Photo by Shelly Babin)

land from Nathan Samson, a descendent of Abraham. And then there are accounts of the house being used for boarding ship workers in the 1740s. There is also a marine atlas, Atlantic Neptune, dated 1774 which marks a dwelling at this exact site, well before Samuel Frazar's purchase of land in

1793. And how does Israel Sylvester, the owner of the second oldest shipyard on this site, fit into the land ownership picture?

"As with all old houses, there are little mysteries yet to be solved," said Dente concerning the Samuel Frazar House. These historical questions and

how they fit into the Samuel Frazar House puzzle will someday be answered by persistent digging. Until then, the Boyntons will continue to restore their majestic historical house, and we will continue to admire it while passing over the Bluefish River Bridge.